

## EMPLOYMENT OF ARCHITECTS.

The fee charged by a firm of architects employed by a postmaster to assist him in preparing drawings and specifications for work involved in certain changes to be made in the post office is not a proper charge against any appropriation under the control of the Office of the Supervising Architect.

Comptroller Downey to the Secretary of the Treasury, November 25, 1914:

I have your letter of the 21st instant, in which you ask whether there is any appropriation under the control of the Office of the Supervising Architect from which may be paid a charge of \$35 made by a firm of architects of Detroit, Mich., for assisting the postmaster at that city in the preparation of drawings and specifications for the work involved in certain minor changes authorized to be made in the Detroit post office. You do not so state, but it is presumed that the charge in question was incurred within the current fiscal year.

The act of February 20, 1893 (27 Stat., 469), authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to obtain plans, drawings, etc., for the erection of public buildings by competition among architects, was expressly repealed by the act of August 24, 1912. (37 Stat., 428.) So far as is known to this office there is now no law specifically authorizing the employment generally of private architects in the preparation of plans, etc., relating to public buildings; and in a decision of this office of date October 4, 1913 (67 MS. Comp. Dec., 35), it was held that by reason of the repeal of the act of February 20, 1893, the Treasury Department was not authorized to enter into a contract with private architects for plans for decorative (mural) painting of a certain public building. Indeed, from the repeal of the above mentioned act it would appear that it is the present policy of the Government that all work relative to plans, specifications, etc., be done by or under the direction of the Office of the Supervising Architect, the establishment charged generally with such duty.

Upon inquiry at the office above mentioned it has been ascertained that it is the practice in cases such as that under consideration for the *custodian* of the building to supply the necessary data relative to any contemplated change, repair, etc., and that from these data the plans and specifications necessary to the work involved are prepared by the Office of the Supervising Architect.

In the present case it appears that the postmaster did not consult the *custodian* of the building relative to the drawings and specifications in question, but that, doubtless through misapprehension as to his authority in such a case, he procured the services of the private architects in preparing the drawings, etc.

While it appears that the postmaster acted in this matter from a sense of duty and in perfect good faith, yet in view of the con-

siderations above mentioned and upon the facts presented it must be held that no appropriation under the control of the Office of the Supervising Architect may lawfully be charged with the expenditure in question.

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